

## **AMEDD Civilian Corps Chief Msg #53 – A Different Type of Message (17 Nov 2014)**

Howdy All,

It's good to be back with you again. Sometimes it seems like it takes a while for me to get untracked and get messages out. It does take a little while to write them and we appreciate your feedback. It's always a pleasure to hear from you when you've got comments or suggestions. Our messages have historically focused on specific happenings, information, or opportunities. This note will be a little different. I'll follow up soon with another one that contains updates and information on what's going on, a bit more like the others so you can keep up with happenings around the MEDCOM and the Army.

For now, if you'll bear with me, I'd like to share some thoughts about Army Medicine and what it means to me. In a discussion with Nancy Quick, our Corps Branch Proponent Officer, it occurred to me that, despite all the times we've "talked" with you in the Corps either via email or when I've visited your organization in person, there are some very personal things about my perspectives that I haven't shared outright. I'm not sure why it hasn't occurred to me to do so before now, but I guess "better late than never" applies. I believe you know I'm very passionate about Army Medicine, but what drives that passion? I'd like to share a bit of that with you so, again if you'll bear with me, here goes.

Maybe I should start with, "Why now?" I'm not sure there's a lot of logic to it. Seems to me that there's so much change in the air with downsizing and reorganization in the Army, decreasing dollars for defense, an unsettled world, and many other things, that maybe it would simply be good to go back to basics. For me that means back to what motivates me to go work every day to do the best I can in my own small way to contribute to making the Army healthier, ...what makes me so proud to be part of it every day. So what is that???

First, I've been totally blessed. For nearly 47 years I've had the opportunity to work with Army Medicine-nearly 30 years on active duty, about 4 years as a contractor, and now nearly 13 years as an Army Medical Department (AMEDD) civilian. I can honestly say I haven't had a single day in which I didn't want to go to work-despite deployments for both wartime and peacekeeping assignments, in the face of many (!) moves, despite the challenges of bureaucracy-even at its best. Now that's a blessing! I guess I've simply enjoyed the blessings for these many years, felt that it was right without doing a lot of introspection that would yield the reasons. Frankly, my latest and most intent introspection began when I became Chief of the AMEDD Civilian Corps.

As Chief of the Corps I often get asked to participate in ceremonies of various sorts. A couple of years ago I took the opportunity to participate in the onboarding process for new civilian employees coming to work here at Fort Sam Houston. As you well know, during the ceremony the newbies take their oath of office. As I listened to the words of that oath I found myself thinking back to the time when I first took an oath-the same as the civilian oath-to become an Army lieutenant in June of 1968. I recall doing so on the baseball field

(no, no football....) at Providence College in Rhode Island. My Mom and Dad were in the audience and I was proud to make them proud. Dad was a World War II veteran having served in the South Pacific; Mom had just finished nursing school and was a member of the Cadet Corps, a prelude to military service, when the war ended. I had learned from both of them that service to country is an admirable goal, an honor, because service to others before self is a great calling.

Some of you have heard me say that in other ways, like, "The greatest thing a citizen can do for his or her country is to defend it, whether that is in uniform or out." As part of the Army Team, we've made a commitment to serve others and put ourselves second. It's simply the nature of what we do. This concept has even more of an impact when you think about being part of Army Medicine. Our mission is, by far it seems to me, the most honorable part of defending the country,...caring for our Soldiers and their families; keeping them healthy; and, when they are ill or injured, caring for them anywhere, anytime, often under circumstances others would not accept, and doing it all the best in the world!

It isn't always easy, sometimes far from it. The very nature of the tasks associated with such a mission means that there will be challenges and, as we all know, those challenges run the gamut from the most complex clinical problems to the most mundane of bureaucratic hurdles. They are all part of the mission, but the real issue is how we deal with them. Do we choose to deal proactively with the challenges or do we choose to let them drive us? It's our call and we make those decisions every day, sometimes from moment to moment. Usually it goes back to the idea of service to others. The question becomes, "What's best for them?" versus "What's best for me?"

Looking at the timeframe in which I entered the Army, you can see that it was about the middle of the Vietnam War. Those were tough times and support to Soldiers wasn't what it is today. As the war came to an end, the Army faced multiple challenges, everything from the level of trust the nation had in its defense complex to internal functional and ethical issues. I think it was the first time I really had to face the question "me or them?" Did I want to be part of this organization or not? My decision after talking with multiple friends, some staying and some leaving, was to stay and work to make it better. As I watched some really good folks depart I thought, "If all the good folks leave who will fix this?" It was interesting because I knew this would be a long term challenge and would require long term commitment from a lot of folks. I thank my parents for teaching me a positive approach to life. I think that's what helped me commit.

That same scenario has played out time and again since my post-Vietnam experience. Despite the challenges, the Army got tremendously better and, even with the ups and downs which occur over time, has gotten better in every case. There were lots of good people who made the same decision I did and helped to make it happen. They saw the Army as a profession and worked hard to make themselves and the nation proud of that profession.

That doesn't mean it's always perfect. Sometimes it just "ain't that pretty...." We all see things that bother us and could be better. Each time that happens it's an opportunity to make that "me/they" decision we talked about earlier. I know that I personally have to make a series of value judgments about the level of effort it takes to work together with my Teammates and overcome obstacles. When these opportunities come I sometimes have to pause for just a minute. In that short respite I think about the words in our oath (BTW the way-in the form of blatant advertising- you can find the oath on the upper right part of the front page on the AMEDD Civilian Corps website at <https://ameddciviliancorps.amedd.army.mil>.) and remember how it commits me to the Army Medicine mission.

And that commitment to mission makes it easier to make the decision to be positive about a situation and then to put mission requirements before my own. Note that I said, "Easier," not "Easy." Sometimes, as I said above, it "ain't that pretty!" But every challenge is an opportunity to excel...to make something better. The neat thing to me is that, given how well we already do our mission, every opportunity to make something better is a chance to add to the terrific legacy that belongs to Army Medicine. And, yes, sometimes that means sucking it up on a personal level to do what is right for the greater good. It may not be as much fun as some other option but, as a professional-and we all are, it's the right thing to do. Positivism and dedication to the mission make it all possible.

H-m-m-m, "professional!" In a number of recent Corps Chief messages we've talked about the Army Profession and how it consists of two components, The Profession of Arms (our uniformed Teammates) and The Civilian Corps (us!). That is terrific to me because it identifies the Team members as both uniformed and not uniformed on an equivalent basis. At our last Civilian Corps Board of Advisors meeting, the Board really took that to heart. They were adamant that we should have a supporting tag line for our Corps. They wanted something simple but powerful, something that demonstrates the obvious commitment of our AMEDD Civilian Corps members to the Army Medicine mission in support of the Army and the Nation. In my mind they not only succeeded, they excelled! The statement is simple but very powerful:

"Army Medicine, Our Profession"

You can see it in use as the header line on the AMEDD Civilian Corps website, again at <https://ameddciviliancorps.amedd.army.mil> (you realize we put a live website link in each message multiple times for a reason, right??!!). The passion that drove their work was evident and you can see it yourselves in a set of videos available via the Corps website in which they talk about the mission and their commitment. Once on the site, you can find the videos by using the link to our video library in the lower left corner and click on the "Other" category. Above I said we are all professionals at what we do for Army Medicine and the Soldiers, Families, Retirees, and others it supports. As Army Medicine professionals we are dedicated to others-it's absolutely what we're about!

I'm not sure what's made me so pensive at this point in time. I'd like to think it's not "old age" (yes, that's an opening, as if you need one!); maybe it's that Thanksgiving is coming and I see my time in Army Medicine as something for which I'm more than a little grateful. As I look over the nearly 47 years since joining the Army Medicine Team, I see incredible growth and so very many positives. When I do feel things might be going the wrong way, looking back over time reminds me that I need to "sweep my own back yard" as my Mom would say, and check to see if the problem is with the issue or with me making the right decision.

Frankly it's more often the latter than the former-sometimes not an easy admission. That kind of thinking requires introspection which sometimes isn't much fun (because I don't like the answers...), versus observation which can be a laugh riot. What I find is that when I do make positive decisions it routinely works out best for all concerned and, although it may require a fair amount of personal energy, the fun of contributing to the success we have come to enjoy routinely in Army Medicine returns. And, we might as well have fun since the options stink!

So, in the end this thought process brings me full circle. What I've found is that conscious, positive decisions that support our mission will benefit others and, invariably, bring me joy as well. I love being a part of the Army Medicine Team. How could I not, given the honor and true beauty of our mission. It's an honor to be part of a values based organization dedicated to the good of the Nation and its people. I'm truly thankful to be blessed with the opportunity to serve. It isn't always easy,...sometimes extremely challenging, but it's always been worth the effort and personal cost associated with even the hard times. In the bottom line we are blessed in this greatest country in the world and have the honor to serve it by executing an incredibly honorable mission. In the end state I am truly "Serving to Heal and Honored to Serve." Those are my thoughts. What are yours?

Thanx for your time and what you contribute daily to the success of the Army Medicine Team. Be safe and take care of your families.

Sincerely,

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